

County Extension Committee Meeting –
September 28, 2011 - Cotton Town Hall

Present: Don Dicklich, Jan Dzwonkowski, Doug Hoffbauer, George Host, Jennifer Lipke, Shari McCorison, Keith Nelson, Peg Sweeney, Al Willman
Others: Gary Eckenberg, Mardi Harder, Shirley Lantz, Patty Swedberg, Barb Liukkonen (via speaker phone)

Shari McCorison, Chair called the meeting to order at 9:05 am. Pledge was recited.
Minutes for June 29 CEC mtg. and Aug. 30 sub- committee mtg. were presented for approval.
Al/Don made a motion to approve; minutes approved-unan.

EFANS Positions

Doug shared his position regarding EFANS positions with the committee. He feels keeping two full-time positions is critical. SLC was just cited as being the 2nd unhealthiest county in the state. Bob Olen continues work in growing fruits and vegetables for healthy eating. Anything less than half-time positions cuts into program and community work. A contract for part-time positions with the county will just be a stop gap; what happens when Kendall/Bob leave permanently. Doug stated we (committee) are here to represent the citizenship and communities.

Peg asked how many people are in the Master Gardener program and what is their exposure. Patty stated there are 60-65 Master Gardeners in our county. They volunteer for various activities and assist all our public programs & events. Mardi's 2010 data information included—MG's reached 132,000 adults and 1,174 youth—public value of \$115,442. Peg asked about the role of extension educators to this group. Barb stated educators provide leadership to the program. In some counties MG's self-organize for 12-18 months, but without a coordinator the group typically tends to fall apart. The extension educator links in with the university—which is critical.

Al asked what we can do as a committee to inform the county we really need to continue this program. Peg stated there is a list of programs the county invests in that are not mandated--to what extent do we continue to fund. Peg and Keith are interested and passionate about Extension; also need to look at what programs have the largest impact and who is our target audience. The county board realizes the importance of Extension.

Shari stated she is very disappointed these two retirements came at a time of budget deficits. It just presents the board with an easier option to fix the budget. As a committee member she needs to ask for funding of two full-time extension educator positions. Peg said SLC looks at all positions and the scrutiny this is getting is the same as all other departments and programs.

Doug supports Shari's position. He doesn't want a reduction to Extension appear too easy; instead wants to be the hard one to cut. The next time the county needs to make cuts, they will look to Extension again. Doug wants Extension to maintain status quo and feels part-time positions will only be a temporary solution; feels this is the beginning of a slippery slope. Mardi asked what would help make the case to the Board that the program is essential. It's about what you see locally—can we condense key messages.

Keith cannot speak for entire county board, but feels nobody discounts the value of Extension or this committee. He has seen a 23.5% levy increase over his tenure; there is a proposed levy of 1.8% this year. We (county) have done work in anticipation of turning the corner but we haven't turned the corner yet. He has a commitment to Extension and feels the county can maintain a level of programming that meets the needs of citizens of the county. We are as financially steady as any other county. He will do everything possible to hold Extension positions, but do not know the outcome yet. The University offered the retirement incentive choice with the RIO (Retirement Incentive Option). The county is stuck in the middle—your best two advocates are on this board. I

think these are very good programs that are going to get a haircut at the end of the day. I'm confident we can get something done, but don't know outcome yet.

Gary discussed budgets timeframes. The retirement announcement of two educators was made at the June 29 CEC mtg. The board had to put together a budget and set levy on Sept. 13. Administration reduced Extension budget by \$100,000 while still attempting to keep the extension positions. We are not there yet in reaching the 1.8%. There was no recommendation from this committee by Sept. 13. By having Bob/Kendall contract with the county there would be no break in service and we can save \$100,000 to get to the 1.8% levy increase. All depts. have budget issues, not just Extension. We could not have two new individuals on board for six months if hired through university. Oct. 1 is the date a letter needs to be sent to the University if we are not continuing these positions. A 90-day notice is required regarding MOA changes. Gary will be writing this letter stating SLC's intent in not continuing with two MOA positions. He contacted Bob and Kendall prior to this mtg. and both showed interest in working on a part-time contract position with the county. They hope to construct a 3-yr. contract.

Doug feels county contracts will not resolve things in the long term and afraid of where Extension will be when these two people leave those positions permanently.

Peg commented to Al's statement that Extension is essential to SLC. Extension is important but not at a level of being an essential service. There is money to be saved by not having these positions with the University. If done properly, she believes we can continue the level of service we have.

Doug said with declining dollars in the county budget we could continue to lose services. He has a fall-back plan of leaving the positions vacant for two months--hire new people at 80% time and raise fees in line to maintain status quo.

A motion was made by Doug/Al and a friendly amendment was recommended by Jennifer: Because our committee believes it is an essential service to the health and well-being of all citizens of St. Louis County, we make a motion to recommend to the county board to continue with two full-time Ag/Hort Extension Educator positions in St. Louis County. Doug realizes the committee should have made a motion by Sept. 13, but believes they still need to show their support. Keith, Don and Peg abstained from voting. Motion was voted on; all other votes were ayes—motion passed.

Holiday Project

Last year's brochure was distributed and members suggested revisions: remove stew recipe and ask nutrition program if they can provide a modern turkey fajitas/turkey stir fry recipe; remove cost per serving as prices have increased; move helpful contacts to back page and put cooking temps/times on front; add color accents for brochure. Patty will follow-up on new recipe and obtain color print cost from county print shop using higher-quality paper. Project fundraising was discussed—have received \$150 in contributions. We ordered 2,000 roasting pans last yr. and have @180 left--will order approx. 1,600. Shari will check with Salvation Army-Duluth and Jennifer/Jan will check with Salvation Army on the Range to see if more pans are needed as number of eligible participants may be higher. Doug will check with Paulson's Super Valu on price for roasting pans (2010 cost was \$.77/pan). Our fundraising goal is \$2,000-\$2,500. An estimate of \$1,900 is needed for pans and additional funds for color printing. Diana Wershay informed Patty she will continue fundraising efforts in the Virginia area.

At this point in the meeting Barb Liukkonen disconnected from her conference call.

Shari will write to Generation W asking for a donation and write a grant to Northland Foundation (grant has to be in Doug's name). The Rotary Club in Virginia/Hibbing will be asked for a donation. Patty will email the contribution letter to committee. Keith suggested writing to Operation Roundup--Lake Country Power for a donation. Shari will write a letter requesting \$1,000 and Keith will deliver it to them. MP&L has a similar program--will ask for \$500.

Patty asked the committee to confirm dates with Salvation Army locations for the holiday food distribution project. Since there is no November CEC meeting, Shari will ask for volunteers to help at SA locations at October CEC mtg.

Other

George asked if there was an exit strategy for Kendall/Bob—should capture their expertise and have a program file that stays as part of this committee. Mardi will follow up with Barb.

Mardi asked about retirement parties for Bob/Kendall. Shari suggested this could be part of our Dec. mtg.—maybe a celebration of Extension. Peg suggested waiting until Jan. /Feb. as we will know more about these positions at that time.

Patty spoke about the relocation of Virginia Office; moving to main floor of NOB. She considers this to be a great location and we have adequate space and offices for staff. The move will begin the first week of October. Keith said this is a temporary location as NOB will be going through extensive remodeling in the future. The goal is to have all services in county-owned buildings.

Patty stated the Root Veggie Fall Fest Program will be held October 6 at St. Michael's Church, Duluth. This is a new venue for an extension program and should work out fine. At times it's difficult to find a location available and that meets our estimated capacity. Peg suggested Midway Town Hall as another possibility for future events.

Mardi asked Gary for clarification of the \$100,000 proposed budget reduction. Gary said the Extension budget was \$799,000 and Administration wanted a \$100,000 reduction made by the Sept. 13 levy deadline.

Next Meeting

October 26: 4-H Youth Development is presenting. Committee gave input as to what they would like to hear about--leadership development for older youth, recruitment efforts, mentoring Wade has received and does Spirit Mountain provide discount rates for Incredible Exchange Program.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made at 11:05 am by George/Peg. Motion was voted on—passed unan.

Respectfully submitted by,
Shirley Lantz